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This story came from a store exclusive bonus booklet that came bundled with Volume 3

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Her body was hot, her face was red, her chest swelled with her excited breaths that wouldn't calm down.

Cooking, cleaning, laundering. Even though she found herself busy with all kinds of daily chores, she was long distracted from work. Her thoughts were already occupied by other things.

Hurrying through the corridor, half of her was wondering how to quickly finish the rest of her work, while the other half did nothing but think about the source of why her heart was pounding.

"...Ah."

Suddenly, because she saw something, the girl voiced a shy word.

Even she could hear how full of joy her inadvertent voice held. She felt her cheeks burning. Then the girl – Rem, increased her pace.

"Oh! You're almost done with your chores, Rem?"

Noticing Rem's presence as she neared him, the boy ahead turned around with a grin.

Short and black hair, sharp sanpaku eyes, a mischievous child's smile. Rather than being very manly, he's more on the cute side. No matter which trait, they all caused "The Horn" inside her to tremble excitedly. Bowing her head in front of the boy, Rem unconsciously smiled as she stopped.

"Yes... Would you like to have some tea together, Subaru-kun?"

She had the look of a girl in love that called out her beloved's name.

Rem, at this point, was aware of the incurable sickness that caused her flustered state.

She could not get the boy out of her mind. Rather, it would be easier to calculate how much time she spent a day without thinking about him. This was to be taken literally. Whether she was asleep or awake, she would be thinking about him.

"Rem, I didn't know you were such a carefree person..."

Isn't that far too much? Even she questioned how abnormal her love was.

The only other person Rem knows that is afflicted with this sickness is Ram nee-sama. Rem understood that, Ram's admiration towards Roswaal was the same as Rem's own feelings towards Subaru. But Rem can't imagine being like nee-sama, where she won't reveal those expressions uncontrollably.

...Nee-sama sure is amazing.

This was Rem's unwavering love towards her sister. *After losing her horn, many aspects of her abilities had become worse than Rem's, but none of it has harmed Rem's respect towards nee-sama.*

Because of this, Rem wondered if her sickness was more severe than her sister's.

"— Rem?"

A male's voice entered her ears. It could be said to be a little childish, but it was also one that had gradually left boyhood. That was the impression the voice gave.

Her blue hair swayed as Rem tilted her head and looked at the person whose voice it came from.

"Yes, is something wrong, Subaru-kun?"

"No, there's nothing wrong, but... aren't you a little too close? Wouldn't it be inconvenient when drinking tea?"

"Really? Rem doesn't find it at all inconvenient."

Close enough that they could feel each other's breath, Rem replied to Subaru's troubled smile with an endearing voice.

The two were in the living room of Roswaal's mansion, where they enjoyed their afternoon tea on the same couch.

Subaru's left arm was tightly stuck next to Rem's right arm.

Though the two had maintained some distance in the beginning, without him noticing, Rem had nestled closer bit by bit.

"Subaru-kun, would you like some more snacks?"

"Eh? There's more? This is really good, these things that Rem made are delicious!"

"Yes. That's because I was praised like this before by Subaru-kun... There's around a hundred of them, is this enough?"

"Are you planning on feeding me until I'm a pig?! Two or three is enough!"

After she received Subaru's praise on the baked cream pastry a few days ago, it was served countless times during their tea time.

Rem excitedly stood up.

"Then, I shall go prepare. If Subaru-kun disappears while I am preparing, then I'll be sad."

"I wouldn't do something that mean. How about we promise on it, a promise."

"...Okay."

Long-awaited by her, Rem stretched her pinky out, while Subaru extended his own with an "it can't be helped" smile. Their pinkies entwined each other, and shook up and down to seal the promise.

"—Hair... cut"

... Was it because of Rem's sickness that Rem was not thinking clearly? She felt as if they had made such an agreement before as she thought about what she blurted.

It was around a week ago, after the Mabeast turmoil subsided. The morning the wounded Subaru opened his eyes, Rem apologized and requested to atone for the trouble. Instead, she received a gentle "punishment [curse]." That morning, Rem's heart was captured. Rem was captivated by the future he described in their promise.

But recently, she had become less satisfied. She wanted more precious promises about the future. Even though Subaru would give a wry smile while he agreed to the promises Rem made, he never refused her selfish desires. So, her love could only grow bigger and bigger.

"That's right, we did promise something like this."

With his warmth still left on her pinky, Rem was about to step out the room when she stopped. Subaru pointed at his hair when she turned around, and revealed his usual, mischievous smile.

"We made a promise about trimming my hair before. I think it's about time I need your help, right?"

The boy must not have known how much those words made Rem's heart beat like crazy.

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... With Rem's skill, taking care of Subaru's hair would be straightforward.

Although it was a fairly simple promise, for Rem, it was more important than anything else. The reason why would be...

"Because this was the first promise with Subaru-kun."

-----Flashback-----

"Just like you have questions about me, I have a lot to ask about you. That's why, let's take care of everything and then talk. We can talk until our throats are sore. Let's make a promise."

He firmly tugged Rem's hand, and hooked their pinkies together.

While Rem was confused by their intertwined pinkies, Subaru already shook on it.

"We made a pinky promise."

"T-that was...?"

"It's the ceremony my hometown does when making a promise. If you break it, you're forced to swallow a thousand needles. It's a punishment of hell."

Subaru's monologue had already surpassed Rem's understanding.

Rem was confused and utterly speechless. To which Subaru snapped his finger, flashed a toothy grin, and said, "I trust Rem, so I want to do something to earn Rem's trust. That's why I made that kind of promise."

"..."

"I said it before, didn't I? I'm the kind of person that would keep his promise after making one. Plus, I have Emilia's blessing, so I'm not concerned at all when I say 'dun worry 'bout it.' "

"Hehe..."

Dumbfounded, Rem was unable to hold it in as she laughed. Seeing Rem smile, Subaru followed suit with a chuckle of his own.

"Then it's a promise. Rem really will ask a lot of things."

"Yeah. I also have things I must ask of you, like my hair."

"Hair...?"

"That's the reason why you keep staring at me all the time."

Hearing Subaru's words, Rem was speechless as her eyes widened. With her blue eyes filled with guilt, she let slip, "Subaru-kun, Rem was—"

"It's fine. You were concerned about the clumsy me, who had a pitiful haircut, so you kept looking at me... am I right?"

In his first loop, Subaru had made a promise with Rem. It was Ram's words that started it, to help Subaru fix his shabby haircut.

Subaru finally understood Ram's words at the time. The real meaning behind it.

It was evident in Rem's stares that, at the time, she held a sense of distrust towards Subaru, so Ram immediately said his hair was messy to fool him.

Now he knew, the opportunity of that promise was borne from a lie.

That's why... smiling inside, Subaru wanted to make the promise of a lie into something truthful.

"Once we safely return, I'll leave it up to you for the style. Make it so that Emilia can't help but snuggle up to me."

"... But Rem can't help when it comes to the character."

"Please be more gentle about saying those things!"

It was a conversation of which the two did not know where it was going.

Noticing Subaru's intentions, Rem followed with a joke, which made Subaru extremely happy.

"Once I leave the children to the villagers, I'll regroup with you immediately. Don't force yourself too hard."

-----Flashback End-----

[Note for those reading this after the anime & not LN: In ep 10 of the anime, Subaru corrects this by asking Ram to request Rem's help for cutting his hair, but in the LN, this does not happen at all. Instead, what happens above is during the forest.]

During the Mabeast turmoil, in order to save the children outside of the village, Subaru and Rem set foot into the forest and made this promise. And at the time, Rem's love for Subaru had not yet blossomed.

Therefore, fulfilling this kind of promise to Rem had an extreme significance.

"It's not that I forgot. It's because I've been running around lately that I haven't had the chance. Even if I mentioned it, once I remember there's a guy who can't read the mood, I could only postpone it."

"It's not like Subaru-kun to have worries at all. It would be better if you were more like your usual self, where you don't think before you speak, cause a mess, then run around trying to fix it."

"Eh?! Why do I feel nostalgic about this feeling of pain in my heart from Rem's harsh words?!"

Pushing her chest on the back of the chair, Rem leaned forward slightly to look at Subaru, and laughed harder.

Although this kind of Rem is unbelievably cute, I definitely cannot say that out loud, Subaru secretly decided.

In order to fulfill the haircut promise, the two arrived at the mansion's atrium. A chair was placed in the middle of the groomed lawn, and with a towel tied around Subaru's neck, everything was ready.

"After changing hair styles, it'll give the impression of a different person. It's quite common in anime and manga, huh."

"If it's done indoors, it'll be difficult to clean up. Whether it be preparations beforehand, or cleaning up afterwards. If it's outside, then we just need to sweep the ground and wash your head. About how short should I cut it to?"

In Rem's point of view, Subaru's hair was still fairly short. There's only a small portion that was messy, and gave a bad impression. *Once that bit is trimmed, it'll be perfect.*

"Yeah... I'm not that good at specifying my hair length. Rem can just cut it to the length where it looks the coolest!"

"Subaru-kun is always at his coolest"

"The purpose of my haircut was denied?! It was over before it began?!"

The chair swayed as Subaru shook. Holding Subaru's shoulder with her hands to prevent him from struggling, Rem stared at Subaru's head carefully.

Though her answer was not a lie, she thought his hair certainly didn't look the best.

"This responsibility is quite heavy."

"Um.... Rem-san? It's fine even if you don't think about it too much? Don't worry too much, just do as you said before and fix the hair ends, slightly groom it..."

While Subaru gingerly proposed a solution, that voice didn't reach Rem.

Moisturizing Subaru's hair slightly, Rem brought out a pair of silver-shining scissors and put on a determined pose.

"....."

Facing her immediate challenge, her hand stopped. Rather, it couldn't stop. Her right hand was trembling violently.

Clickity, Clackity. Rem was stunned by her own hand's trembling. Though she had kept calm, all her nervousness was redirected to her right hand.

"Subaru-kun, this is bad. My hand won't stop trembling."

"Hm? A little bit of trembling is fine... Oi, isn't this trembling too excessive?! Is this even ok?! This level of shaking would crack a skull! Don't tell me you're actually not accustomed to giving other people haircuts?!"

"Rem is responsible for nee-sama and Roswaal-sama's haircuts... but Subaru's is the first time..."

"There's no way a barber would be able to make a living if he said such a thing!"

A barber that refused to serve first-time customers would no doubt go bankrupt. But that matter wasn't important right now. Rem's hand was still trembling fiercely because she had to give Subaru a haircut.

"Well... even though I told you 'it's fine if you mess up, don't worry about it!' I guess it's hard to change your feelings so quickly. But to be this nervous... Even if the cut is slightly bad, after a week it'll recover."

"But, because of Rem, Subaru might have to endure a week of a bald state..."

"If I'm going to become hairless, then it's probably better to stop, right?!"

She extended her hand again to stop the chair that Subaru sat on from shaking. Rem proceeded to rack her brain to stop her trembling hands. All of a sudden, she inadvertently blurted out what she was thinking. It was...

"Does Subaru-kun have any uneasiness by entrusting Rem, this kind of person, with this?"

Those were the words she had unintentionally said. But after they were spoken, they left behind a depressing and heavy pressure on Rem's shoulders.

Yes, that must be it.

No matter how you look at it, the fact that Rem had tried to kill Subaru-kun does not change.

Rem almost executed Subaru twice at the Mabeast forest. And if one were to count Subaru's final act of becoming bait to die, then it was thrice.

"Twice inside the forest, Subaru-kun saw Rem's nature. Rem's Oni personality... even before that, Rem also..."

Subaru-kun's presence at the mansion was an unsettling factor, and Rem had questioned whether to eliminate him.

That suspicion will surely wrap itself around the fragile heart that upholds Rem, and will someday explode.

If Rem doesn't resolve this here and now, then Rem will surely cause Subaru-kun to die.

Up to this point, this sense of guilt has plagued Rem, the perpetrator. Then, as the victim, Subaru-kun must naturally be in even more pain. Then why? Why can he show Rem this kind of smile?

Why is he able to sit in front of Rem so carelessly?

"Rem."

A calm voice. Subaru was calling out her name. She was suddenly at a loss, and could not form a response.

Towards that self-deprecating confession, what would he say?

Scared.

Don't want to hear it.

Don't want to destroy this illusion of intimacy. Her heart beat furiously from fear.

"In my hometown, there's a fairy tale called 'The King with Donkey Ears.' "

"Yes... Eh...?"

"Once upon a time, there was a king with very long donkey ears. When the king needed a haircut, he would call a barber into the palace. But, no matter who, they would laugh out loud when they saw the king's donkey ears. And as a result, would be beheaded by the king. Among them, there was a barber that finally managed to hold back and not laugh. But to withhold the king's secret, the barber eventually could not take it. He ran up a mountain, dug a hole, and shouted in it."

Subaru cupped his hands and shouted, "the king has donkey ears for ears!!! He shouted again and again. At last, even the trees around him recorded it. He then made a flute out of those trees, and blowing into it would make the sound 'the king has donkey ears for ears.' In the end, because all the citizens of that country used the flute, the secret now had become known to everyone."

"Eh...?"

Although it was an interesting story, Rem was unable to understand the underlying lesson and looked at Subaru, puzzled.

At Rem's expression, Subaru smiled.

"Rem's forehead has an Oni's horn!!!"

"!!!"

Subaru shouted once again, causing Rem to jump. Towards her reaction, Subaru patted his knees.

"The king was ashamed of his donkey ears, so he beheaded everyone who spilled his secret. Rem, are you ashamed of being an Oni?"

"N-no such thing. Rem being ashamed of her birth... something like that isn't too big of a concern."

"Would you find me telling your secret unforgivable?"

"No. Rem believes that Rem coming from the Oni tribe is something that doesn't need to be kept hidden."

Returning Subaru's gaze, she gave him a firm answer. Subaru sat back down.

"Then there's no problem! Since there's no possibility that Rem would harm me because of her origins, then I have no reason to be worried. Ahh... I'm relieved."

"B-but, the things Rem did to Subaru-kun—"

"If you anger a girl, you'll get an extremely scary stare. It's something that boys learn about from their fathers early on. Since it's my fault for forgetting such a thing, let's just call it even, ok?"

Such an outrageous sophistry left Rem speechless.

Subaru looked back to see Rem keeping silence, and continued, "Well... how's your trembling hand doing?"

"Ah..."

Her gaze fell on her hands after hearing those words. It was then Rem noticed her trembling had stopped. Even with the scissor's tip pointing at Subaru's head, her fingers did not have a trace of hesitation.

The kind of changes Subaru's words brought to Rem's heart were unknowable. After all, everything he'd said has had a major impact to Rem's feelings. Those unstoppable ripples stirred her heart.

But Rem knew without a doubt that her own timidity had been swallowed whole by the sickness of her heart and disappearing without a trace.

Knowing that Rem's trembling had stopped, Subaru relaxed and leaned his back on the chair, entrusting himself to Rem. He pointed at his head.

"Well, please give me a cool hairstyle. One that'll be handsome enough that Emilia-tan can't help but fawn over me."

The naive boy did not notice his words deeply stabbed into the girl's heart behind him. But even his innocence was something that she loved. Rem smiled.

"... Subaru-kun, no matter when, is always fascinating."